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SUBJECT: Belarusian TV Accuses U.S. Diplomats of Revolutionary Activities

Refs: A) Minsk 1352, B) Minsk 1006, C) Minsk 1327

11. (U) Summary: Belarus' national television channel aired exposes on November 4 and 13 accusing U.S. intelligence agencies of using NGOs and the human rights/democracy campaign as covers for spreading revolutions around the world. The hosts of the two programs proposed that Emboffs were participants in the campaign, which is the purpose of their trips to the outlying regions in Belarus. One expose showed footage of Emboffs at their Grodno meetings allegedly giving instructions to the opposition on how propaganda and money should be used to remove the regime. The host then accused Emboffs of violating diplomatic courtesy for failing to inform or meet with Grodno authorities and the press, although the program did show Pol Chief speaking to cameras in the mayor's office. The second expose attacked all current and former Poloff staff with the same allegations, provided their names and pictures, and showed additional footage of Emboffs' in-country trips and events at the DCM's residence. End Summary.

Human Rights and Democracy: Covers For U.S. Spying

12. (U) On November 4, Belarus' state-controlled national television channel BT aired its daily program Post Scriptum, in which host Yuri Lednik accused U.S. intelligence agencies of supporting revolutions under the pretext of human rights and democratic development. Lednik cited an October conference in Prague on human rights and insinuated that the conference's keynote speaker, former CIA Director James Woolsey, was a leader of this campaign and still working as an active CIA administrator. Lednik accused the NGO Freedom House of being a cover for a U.S. operative group that is spreading the "Orange Plague" (revolution) around the world. According to Lednik, every alleged human rights allegation made by Americans must first be approved by U.S. "chekists" (Old Soviet term for operatives in Lenin's NKVD). Throughout Lednik's monologue, BT broadcasted photos of the Pentagon, the Statue of Liberty, and demonstrators holding American flags in the U.S. Creepy Halloween music, similar to that heard during horror movie knife scenes, continued in the background during Lednik's speech.

13. (SBU) Lednik opined that the U.S. could never stop fighting wars and was at a loss when the Cold War ended. However, the U.S. was now involved in a battle for "democracy" and instead of using bombs and tanks, it uses ideology and propaganda as weapons. According to Lednik, close friends of the White House are creating a number of radio stations within the U.S. that are spreading the administration's propaganda. [Comment: Accompanying this

last statement BT showed footage of liberal radio commentator Al Franken speaking on his radio show, insinuating that he was helping the Bush administration spread its ideology. Yet another example of BT's poor understanding of who is who in the U.S.]

U.S. Diplomats Involved in the Conspiracy

¶4. (U) Speaking about American chekists at work, Lednik referred to Emboffs' October 25 visit to Grodno (ref A), a large city located near the border between Belarus and Poland, and claimed it was an inspection rather than a diplomatic visit. Lednik, who showed footage of Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff and gave their names and titles, accused the diplomats of gathering information from radical opposition nationalists and opposition media. Video footage showed Emboffs and the Embassy vehicle in a parking lot and entering meetings. Some footage appeared to be secretly shot from an office building across from a restaurant where Emboffs were meeting Union of Belarusian Pole activists.

¶5. (U) Lednik reported that the Grodno trip was not the Poloff's first inspection trip outside of Minsk. Referring to an August trip to Gomel in which Poloff was detained (ref B), Lednik claimed that Poloff had closed conversations with Gomel's active opposition members at a private apartment. The opposition activists received instructions from the diplomat and one activist subsequently quit his job and joined a rival political party. According to Lednik, it is essential for the opposition to follow the directions given by their "supreme commanders." [Note: This segment was accompanied by footage of Poloff and a locally employed staff member leaving the apartment following their police detainment.]

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¶6. (U) Lednik called Emboffs' failure to inform local authorities about their visit or meet with the regional administration a blatant disrespect of diplomatic courtesy. Lednik wondered what the USG would think if Belarusian diplomats met with separatists in Texas without informing the authorities. Belarusian diplomats, according to Lednik, would be accused of violating the sovereignty of the U.S., but American diplomats think they can do whatever they want in Belarus. [Note: Emboffs did meet with the mayor of Grodno and the head of the city's Council of Deputies. The mayor told Emboffs during the private meeting that it was not necessary for diplomats to call on local officials every time they visit his city.]

¶7. (U) Lednik opined that Emboffs were unable to gather objective information from the opposition in Grodno since it was all one-sided, distorted, and full of rumors and lies. Unfortunately, according to Lednik, diplomats base their reports on such information. The American diplomats were interested only in propaganda work and the influence of the opposition on the population in the region. The Embassy could have asked the opposition activists to come to Minsk, but the diplomats did not want to be fooled with all the receipts, checks, and reports to prove that their money had been properly spent on "fighting the dictatorship." Instead, Emboffs want to control the expenses and traveled to Grodno to see first hand how American taxpayers' money was being spent.

¶8. (SBU) The diplomats allegedly arrived to find out about the membership and political parties' structure, but Lednik pointed out that all information on parties was available at the Ministry of Justice. According to Lednik, the American diplomats in Grodno had something else in mind. [Note: At this point, BT showed stock footage of a large protest in Minsk that took place several years ago in which demonstrators threw rocks and concrete at the police. BT and other state media channels often show this footage when

speaking about the instability of a revolution.] Lednik opined that American diplomats are trying to replace the legal Belarusian government with an easily controllable regime that would be beneficial to the U.S. Hence, Americans are in search of people who will implement their ideas. Lednik concluded that the U.S. has tried to mobilize the youth, trade unions, and ethnic minorities for this purpose, but have thus far failed.

Who is Who in the Pol Section

¶9. (U) The November 13 expose on BT's Center of Attention similarly accused U.S. diplomats in Belarus of inappropriate conduct by "hiding behind opposition doors" and not speaking with state authorities. The opposition, according to host Yuri Prokopov, presents diplomats "one-sided" and "false" information whereas the government authorities are willing to give the diplomats "real" and current information.

¶10. (U) Prokopov criticized the Human Rights Report for portraying Belarus negatively and ignoring Belarus achievements in combating human and drug trafficking, its successful cross-border cooperation, and stable economy. Prokopov claimed this "one-sided" information stems from Emboff trips similar to the ones to Gomel, Slutsk (ref C) and Grodno. [Note: Prokopov's program showed various footage and gave the names of some former and all current Poloffs, the DCM, and Ambassador.] At one point, Prokopov called one Poloff an "amateur, or a professional in non-traditional tourism" because he is reportedly the Embassy employee who most actively engages in "secret" meetings with opposition members in private apartments.

¶11. (U) Prokopov called diplomatic meetings with the opposition in private apartments a "dirty" tradition introduced by a former PAS officer (name and footage shown) and is now "practiced" at the DCM's residence. [Note: Accompanying footage showed PAS and Pol personnel and guests entering the DCM's residence for a cocktail party.] Prokopov, similar to Lednik, concluded that the main reason for these meetings is to overthrow Belarusian government and install an easily controllable regime.

Comment

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¶12. (SBU) These exposes are just the latest, but most hostile, in a series of attacks against the Embassy. In October, a Gomel newspaper article published an article alleging that all Emboff trips to Gomel are covers for espionage and listed most of the trips Emboffs have made to the city in the last year. The TV news reports unambiguously and aggressively accuse Embassy personnel of espionage and revolutionary activities. Like previous news stories, the journalists have distorted Embassy statements and Emboff footage to create a controversial story. Lednik, for example, claimed Emboffs would not speak to reporters or meet with the Grodno authorities, but the footage they aired showed Pol Chief speaking to their cameras inside the mayor's office (although his statements were muted and no footage of the mayor was used). Prokopov's sensational story did not introduce new allegations, but introduced a larger spectrum of Embassy personnel while providing names and pictures. The hostile "news" coverage serves to further distort the view the Belarusian public has of USG intentions and activities in Belarus, further obstructing our public diplomacy efforts. Furthermore the aggressive camera work seeks to intimidate Embassy contacts and complicate routine Embassy field travel.

¶13. (SBU) Comment Cont'd: The deputy BKGB director has made comments that claim the U.S. has plans to intervene in Belarus. The Embassy has taken up these reports with the

Belarusian MFA and even sent a diplomatic note in protest. The MFA reported that they have spoken with the Ministry of Information (MoI) to caution journalists about interfering with diplomatic work, but has not answered our diplomatic protest. Furthermore, the MFA contends that the MoI cannot control the work of these "journalists." We continue to provide our responses in Embassy statements and press conferences, but the state controlled media refuses to air or print these statements, which are noted only in the small independent media.

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